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## Remarks to the Women's Leadership Forum July 17, 1996

*The President.* Thank you.

*Audience member.* Love you, Mr. President!

*The President.* Thank you. [Laughter] I hope you've had half as good a time tonight as I have. I want to thank Senator Dodd and Chairman Fowler for being here. I want to thank all of the leaders of the WLF, and especially I thank my friend Carol Pinsky. And I thank you, Cynthia Friedman, for the enormous work you have done, especially at this time. We thank you for being such a brave and good friend. [Applause] Thank you.

I enjoyed being up here with my team. Sometimes I hate to be last, you know. The very first speech I ever gave as a public official, 20 years ago, January of 1977, I was attorney general. I went to a Rotary Club installation banquet. It's one of these deals that starts at 6:30; there were 500 people there. Everybody in the crowd but four people got introduced; they went home mad. [Laughter] I got up to talk at a quarter to 10. And the guy that introduced me was the only person there more nervous than me, and the first words out of his mouth was, "You know, we could stop here and have had a very nice evening." [Laughter] Now, he didn't mean it that way. [Laughter] At least I don't think he did. But we could stop here and have had a very nice evening. [Laughter]

I want to say about Tipper Gore, you know, we share the same birthday; therefore, we are under the same—but she's younger than I am. Therefore, we are under the same sign. We have the same sort of enthusiasm about life. And she is always irreverently puncturing my balloon. [Laughter] But I appreciate her for many things, but the story that the Vice President told you about what she said when she heard Senator Dole was resigning from the Senate is true. If this country had a hundred people as committed to mental health reform and adequate mental health care as she is, we could solve that problem in a matter of months.

I want to say—let me just give you an example—when I tell people all the time that Al Gore is the most important Vice President in history and he has done more than anybody else ever has, really I'm bragging on myself, you know, because I think I showed such good sense in selecting him. [Laughter] And besides that, the more he does, the more likely it is I can play golf a couple times a month. [Laughter]

But to give you an example of the sort of range of what he has done and the difference that he made for our country, it would be impossible for me to describe to you the extent to which our partnership with Russia to make the 21st century a better world for all of our children has been facilitated by this remarkable commission that he and Prime Minister Chernomyrdin of Russia have. All of the things they have worked on, all of the problems they have worked out, all the problems they have avoided developing between our two countries as we move into this period of transition, it's just been staggering.

And then he came back with no sleep, and the first thing we did today was to have an announcement that he helped to work out in which the cellular telephone folks agreed to give 50,000—just as a starter, not all—50,000 free telephones to all the community citizen patrols that are working with police departments around the country so they can call in and help prevent crimes and help deal with medical emergencies. It's an amazing thing. So this is a lot better country than it was 4 years ago in part because of the incredible range and impact of his labors.

I thank you for the way you received the First Lady tonight. My friends and family at home used to tell me that if they're shooting at you it must be because they're afraid you're doing something. [Laughter] What I would like to say about her is that that book that she wrote was written sort of out of the experience of

her entire life. And the ideas that were embodied in that book were the ideas she was living by when I first met her a long time ago now. And I am more grateful than I can say for the fact that she has been willing to continue to stand for those things and to fight for those things at home and around the world in the face of political fire that came only because she happened to be my wife and I thought she ought to be able to speak her mind and make this country a better place along with the rest of us. *[Applause]* Thank you.

Al pretty much introduced everybody I wanted to introduce. I wish we could introduce all of our appointees. But I do want to make note of the fact that we started the three organizations within the Government that I think are important, and I ought to acknowledge the women who head those groups: Bonnie Campbell, who heads the Violence Against Women Office at the Department of Justice; Susan Blumenthal, who heads the Women's Health Office at the Department of Health and Human Services; and Betsy Myers, who heads the White House Office of Women's Initiatives. *[Applause]* Thank you very much.

And there's one other very senior person in my White House I have to introduce today because this is her birthday, the Special Assistant to the President for Public Policy and Public Liaison, Alexis Herman, who is here tonight. Where is she? *[Applause]* Thank you.

Now, I saved Ann Richards and Shirley Caesar until last because it occurred to me that they made me feel right at home; I heard a gospel singer and then I heard a gospel preacher. *[Laughter]* And usually when you hear that where I come from, the last person is supposed to just pass the plate and go home. *[Laughter]* But you've already passed the plate. *[Laughter]* And your reaction to Shirley, who was wonderful both in her words as well as her song, thank you very much, and all of you who came with her, and to Ann Richards, who can say things and get away with them that the rest of us can't say—*[laughter]*—and tells the truth in a way that even those who don't like it can understand it, makes me think that basically what I am now doing, as we used to say at home, is preaching to the saved.

So I want to just make a couple of arguments to you very quickly, and I hope you will think about it. First of all, what Ann said is right. I don't care what these polls say, it's better

to be good than bad, because they reflect the choices before the American people. But the election is a long time from now. And you should look at these polls as a picture of a horserace that's not over. So forget about the politics and think about the substance. Just put it out of your mind except for the substance, what's at stake here.

So I'd like to begin with this: Everybody always talks about this gender gap as if it's something the Republicans ought to be trying to close. We've got a few fellows here tonight. I want you to close the gender gap in our favor. Bring them over here. Don't just preach to the saved. Talk to people here.

It is simply not true that the issues that are part of the record of the last 4 years, the differences between us and the things at stake in the future, are divided in their impact by men and women. That is not true. That is not true. Everybody has got the same stake in the future of this country. They may be perceived in different ways, and I'll say more about that in a minute.

But I want you to go out of here with a commitment to spend some time every day between now and November trying to talk to people about what's at stake here and the choices for our country. We are going to walk into the 21st century on the bridge we build in this election. And there is no status quo option; we're going to take one way of change or another, and we'll have to live with the consequences for a very long time. So we need to think through that and make the right decision.

I just want you to think about three things. Number one, I want you to think about the record. And I'll say no more about it because others have spoken about it. But it matters because it's an indication of what will happen, number one, and number two, because the results have been good. We passed our economic program. They said it would be the end of the world, the sky would fall, there would be at least a bad recession. And we said, no, we'll cut the deficit in half, and 8 million jobs will be created. Well, we were both wrong. We cut the deficit by 60 percent, and we have 10 million new jobs.

They said they were the party of fiscal responsibility, but they opposed our deficit reduction plan. And now, this is the first administration which has lowered the deficit in all 4 of its

years in office since—listen to this—the 1840's. So there is no deficit left in our budget except that caused by the interest we pay on the debt run up in the 12 years before I moved to Washington. We have an operating surplus in our budget today. And you should know that.

The crime rate is coming down for 4 years in a row. And one of the reasons is because we stood for things: 100,000 police, prevention programs, the right kind of punishment, and the ban on assault weapons and the Brady bill and the Violence Against Women Act and Megan's Law. Those things matter.

And you know, one of the things they used to say caused the gender gap was all this gun business. Well, not a single hunter or sportsman has lost his rifle since we passed the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban. But 60,000 fugitives, felons, and stalkers don't get to have a handgun because of the Brady bill. We were right, and they were wrong about that. And I want you to think about it.

There are 1.3 million fewer people on welfare today than there was the day I became President, not because we've tried to be tough on kids but because we tried to make it possible for people to go to work and take care of their children. We've increased child support collections by 40 percent. And I'm proud of that; that matters. And every American has a stake in it.

So the first thing I want you to say to people is, look, there's a record here and the results are good. We're better off than we were 4 years ago.

The second thing I want you to say to people is, this is a happy election for the voters because there's no guesswork in it. *[Laughter]* You know, usually there's a little guesswork. I mean, you took a chance on me in '92. You heard what they said, that I was out there, Governor of some place 40 miles west of Podunk, couldn't find my way to the White House. You heard all that. They said you took a chance on me. None of that this time. No guesswork. You know what I'm going to do because of what I have done and because what I'm advocating to do flows naturally out of it. And you know what they will do because they already did it. I just vetoed it and stopped it the first time. You know what they'll do.

So tell people, if you want this, if you want fewer people in Head Start and you think there ought to be fewer college loans, if you think

we ought to eviscerate the Environmental Protection Agency and stop cleaning up toxic waste, if that's what you think we ought to do, you can get that job done. If you believe we ought to eliminate AmeriCorps, our national service program, which has already given 45,000 young people a chance to earn some money for college by serving their communities, it's the symbol of what we're trying to do in this country; if you believe that we ought to walk away from a 30-year guarantee that Medicaid has made to the seniors in this country that need help, being in nursing homes, to poor pregnant women and their little infant babies, and to families with people with disabilities in them so that they wouldn't be driven into poverty to get decent care for their families, you can get that job done. Just vote for them. They did it once. I just stopped it. If that's what you want, if you think Medicare premiums ought to be raised twice as much as needs to be just to bail out the system, but they want to do it more and create a two-tier class of Medicare, you can have that.

I think that this is a very serious argument. You must make this argument. There is no guesswork here. You know what I'm going to do; you know what they're going to do. This is not close. You just decide. And you have to let people know what decision is out there.

You know, there shouldn't be a lot of smoke and mirrors, and I don't want to get into—you know, I was asked the other night on an interview program that I did for the new television network to name a quality—a caller called in on E-mail and said, "Tell me what you admire most about Senator Dole." And I said, "Well, I don't just admire one thing about Senator Dole; I admire a lot of things. But the thing I think I like the most about him is I really believe he loves America." And I believe that. I don't think we need to run a hateful campaign and demean the people who are our opponents and try to do that. I don't believe in that.

But we have a very different view here. And we've got to make sure every single, solitary citizen understands that there are consequences. That's the second thing I want to say.

The third point and the most important of all is that this election is about how you want our country to look as we stand on the dawn of the new century. What do you want it to be like 20 or 30 years from now for your chil-

dren and your grandchildren? That's really what it's about.

I want to just mention two things Ann Richards said that got us all up out of our seats. We thought it was so funny—you clapped. But there are two germs here of ideas that I want to mention because they have a lot to do with what I believe we ought to be doing.

The first thing she said that was great is that the other guys think that the country's in deep trouble because people on welfare stay home with their children instead of going to work, but the country's in trouble because middle class women go to work instead of staying home with their children. And you liked that because it was true. You liked that; that was sort of funny. And then she said that you ought to be for me because I wasn't afraid to be around women that were smarter than I was, or something like that. *[Laughter]* Whatever she said, strong women or whatever. And you liked that. *[Laughter]* And I have to like that. I have no choice. So I like that. *[Laughter]*

So I want you to think about this: We're living through a time of enormous change in the way we work, in the way we live, in the way we raise our children, in the way we relate to each other, in the way we relate to the rest of the world. We know there are economic factors that have caused this. We know there are social factors that have caused this. And every one of us is worried about meeting the challenges of our lives and preserving our values that we hold dear. And the reason you liked both those things is that—in the first thing, the sort of either-or deal Ann said about welfare, it struck you if not hypocritical at least internally contradictory. But the truth is that what we want for poor women, for middle class women, for rich women, and for their spouses and for their children is the same thing. We want people to be able to live out their own dreams. And if they want to work or if they have to work, we want people to be able to succeed at home and at work, right? We want people to be able to succeed at home and at work.

Now, that is a huge, important idea. Why? Because that's why the family leave law is important. And I was strong for it, and the nominee of their party was opposed to it. And I want to expand it in the next term to cover regular visits to the doctor and regular visits to the school so parents can have some time to see their children. Why? Because—that's why

pension reform is important. That's why health care reform is important. That's why all these things are important. Why? Because you can't divide your life up anymore. You can't pretend that you're some sort of segmented little person. If you want to have a whole life, if you want people to be able to live out their dreams, then you have to make it possible for people to succeed at home and at work. And if they have to choose one or the other, we're in deep trouble.

What are the other things? Well, the President doesn't mind being around strong women, strong Vice President, strong anybody else. *[Laughter]* Is that a sign of weakness? I don't think so. You know, my mother, bless her soul, had a lot of interesting qualities—*[laughter]*—but one of the things I learned from her at an early age is that she never begrudged another soul their success. She never did. If somebody else was doing well, it made her happy. Even if they didn't like her, it made her happy. It didn't bother her, ever. All she ever wanted to do was to get a fair deal and have a chance to be happy too.

And the way we practice our politics will determine whether America can manage this diversity we have in a way that makes us stronger, richer, and more together, or a way that divides us more and makes us weaker and causes us to stagger into the 21st century instead of charge into it. And this is the biggest problem in the world today.

I mean, Hillary and I went to Northern Ireland in December, and they were the happiest people you ever saw. People—the Catholics and the Protestants—cheering, six, seven deep in the street, happy. They couldn't even remember what they were fighting about. A few irresponsible people slip the tracks, doesn't take any time, the people are fighting again, defining their lives in terms of what religion they're not, which side of the street they don't live on, who they aren't, who they can look down on, who they can march against or throw a rock against. It's wrong and it's foolish and it's self-defeating, but it's so easy.

Bosnia is not a very big country. Biologically the Croats, the Serbs, and the Muslims are virtually indistinguishable. But they spent a lot of time in the last few years slaughtering each other by the tens of thousands because of what they weren't.

It is the curse of the Middle East that I pray we can find an answer to. It is driving the terrorism. It's driving terrorism. It's driving the proliferation of dangerous weapons. It drives children into gangs and makes them callous about the violence they do to each other. This is not a little thing. This is a big thing. How do you look at other people? This is a huge deal.

So I have said before, I'll say again, I think my major job as President is to get us all to think about how we want to go into the 21st century and what kind of jobs we all have to do to get there. See, I really believe that the best days of this country are still ahead. I believe that technology will do more good than harm. I believe when we get every classroom and every library in this country hooked up to the information superhighway, you're going to see an explosion of democracy in learning and you're going to see people able to access things that would formerly have been beyond their wildest dreams. I believe we're going to create a lot more jobs than we lose.

I believe that the best days of this country are ahead of us. But we have to make some simple decisions. And I don't think we can get into these divisions, like the one Ann said about the welfare and the middle class mothers. The argument people have about the Government—what was the argument people were having about the Government when we showed up here? Well, that the Government should be able to create a program in a bureaucracy to help solve any problem, on the one hand, or that the Government was always the problem and should just get out of the way, on the other. Both are wrong.

What I think we have to do is to create opportunity for everybody—everybody—which means invest more in education and technology and research and giving people the tools to make the most of their own lives. I think we have to expect responsibility from everybody, which is why I have fought so hard on crime and for the right kind of welfare reform and for tough child support enforcement and for the Office of Violence Against Women and for all these things, because we can't tolerate people who believe they have a right to destroy or limit other people's lives and walk away from their own responsibility. I think that's important.

And Al Gore has proved with his reinventing Government project you can do those things

with a Government that's smaller and less bureaucratic. So, yes, it's smaller and less bureaucratic, but we're approving AIDS drugs quicker at the FDA than any other major country in the world. We're selling broadcast licenses at the FCC and making billions of dollars to put against the deficit. Our emergency management agency is now the envy of the world, not the goat of the United States. Our Small Business Administration, you heard, increased loans to women by 86 percent, to minorities by 65 percent, and cut the budget and doubled the overall loan volume.

So we can do these things, opportunity and responsibility. But the most important thing of all is that we've got to make up our minds whether we're going to go into the 21st century thinking about the gender gap or the religion conflict or whether it's poor people or middle class people or whether we're going to say, look, we think we'll try to do something different; we believe we'll go into the 21st century together. Everybody who is willing to work for opportunity, everybody who's willing to be responsible, we don't care what your race is, we don't care what your gender is, we don't care where you come from, we don't care what you started with. We want to see you have a chance to live out your dreams if you will define your existence not in terms of who you're against but in terms of what it means to be an American working together in one community going forward. That is the most important thing.

But I'm telling you, this is the curse of the world today. You take away the cold war and we're not worried about the evil Communists blowing us up, somebody goes and starts torching a church and pretty soon it becomes a thing to do in a country founded by people who were looking for religious liberty.

So I want you to think about this. I want you to go out and talk to people—it would suit me if you never read an article about the polls until the day after the election—and say, look, this administration has a record. It's been good for America. This administration and its opponent, both the party and the candidate, have clear differences, and we don't have to guess what they'll do because both of them have already played their hand.

And most important of all, we've got to go into the next century with the right kind of change. We can meet our challenges. We can protect our values but only if we really believe

that everybody should have the chance to live out their dreams and we're determined to give them that chance, only if we challenge everybody to be responsible and define their lives not in terms of their ability to abuse people or walk away from their responsibilities, and only if we respect the differences among us.

No nation is as well-positioned as the United States to seize the dreams of the next century. All we have to do is make up our mind that we're going to do it together.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:33 p.m. at the Sheraton Washington Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Christopher J. Dodd, general chairman, and Donald L. Fowler, national chairman, Democratic National Committee; Carol Pinsky and Cynthia Friedman, national co-chairs, Women's Leadership Forum; Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin of Russia; Ann Richards, former Texas Governor; and singer Shirley Caesar.

## Remarks on the Aircraft Tragedy in East Moriches, New York, and an Exchange With Reporters

July 18, 1996

*The President.* I'd like to say a few words about the crash last night. First, on behalf of the American people, I want to say to the families of the passengers of Flight 800,<sup>1</sup> we are well aware that only the passage of time, the love of your family, and faith in God can ease your pain, but America stands with you. Our thoughts, our prayers have been with you through the night, and they will be with you in the days to come.

Our Government is doing everything we can to continue the search for survivors and to find out the causes of this accident. The Chief of Staff, Leon Panetta, has just met in the White House Situation Room with all the agencies involved and has finished briefing me on our response. I've asked him to ensure that our response will continue to be prompt, effective, and comprehensive.

Right now the Coast Guard, the National Transportation Safety Board, the FAA, and the FBI are on the scene of the crash. As of now, no survivors have been found. Hundreds of rescue personnel rushed to help in pitch dark, lit only by the flames of burning wreckage. And I want to thank them for their brave work in these treacherous waters on behalf of the people who were on that flight.

We do not know what caused this tragedy. I want to say that again; we do not know as of this moment what caused this tragedy. We

are beginning the painstaking process of piecing together what happened. Additional briefings to provide the latest details of what is being done will be coordinated by the Department of Transportation and will be given to you on a regular basis. We will determine what happened. But for now, I want to caution again the American people against jumping to any conclusions and ask that today, overwhelmingly, our people remember the families of the people who are on that flight in their prayers.

Thank you very much.

*Q.* Are you worried that it is terrorism?

*Q.* Mr. President, are you doing anything further on the issue of airline safety? Are you ordering any steps today, any action that you think might be warranted?

*The President.* Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press], I want to wait, first of all, until we at least get further along in this investigation. I think we need to focus on this investigation now.

*Q.* Are you worried, sir, that there is some kind of increase in terrorism in this country now? And what are you doing to try to get at least in position to combat that, if it is the reason for this crash?

*The President.* Well, we are doing a number of things continuously to try to continue to upgrade the safety of our infrastructure and the ability of the United States to protect itself from terrorism. That's one of the reasons I pushed so hard for the antiterrorism legislation.

<sup>1</sup> White House correction.